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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Security Council extends UNAVEM III mandate until 8 May; reminds Angolan Government and UNITA of obligations to peace process.

* Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight says staff cuts of more than 10 per cent could affect United Nations' ability to implement its mandates and programmes.

* Special Human Rights Rapporteur appeals to Nigerian Government over arrest of two lawyers.

* Iraqi delegation outlines urgent food and medical needs during ongoing "oil for food" talks at United Nations Headquarters.

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The Security Council today extended the mandate of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III) until 8 May. In unanimously adopting resolution 1045 (1996), the Council expressed concern at numerous delays in implementing the Lusaka Protocol and reminded the Angolan Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), of their obligation to consolidate the peace process. It urged them to maintain the cease-fire, conclude talks on integrating the armed forces, undertake demining and start integrating UNITA personnel into administrative and government institutions. UNAVEM III was established in February 1995 to help the Angolan Government and UNITA restore peace and national reconciliation. The Protocol covers military, legal and political issues the parties agreed on during peace talks. One of the main military issues concerns the demilitarization and quartering of UNITA forces.

The Council welcomed Angolan Government efforts to cease offensive operations, withdraw its troops from offensive positions near UNITA's quartering areas, release all prisoners of war, begin quartering its rapid reaction police and terminate contracts of expatriate personnel. Noting UNITA's public commitment to quarter its troops expeditiously and comprehensively, the Council expressed deep concern at the slow pace of the quartering and disarming. It reiterated that the quartering of UNITA forces was a first step in its transformation to a legitimate political party and crucial to the peace process.

(more)

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The Council urged UNITA to proceed immediately with the orderly, large-scale and verifiable movement of its troops to quartering areas in strict adherence to the new timetable agreed to by the parties on 9 January and to complete quartering before the new mandate expired. The Secretary-General was asked to report to the Council by 7 March, 4 April and 1 May, on concrete steps taken by the Angolan Government and UNITA towards implementing the goals and timetable they have agreed to.

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The Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Karl Paschke, said today a looming financial crisis did not make meaningful management reforms -- the more effective and efficient delivery of services -- easier or more likely. He told correspondents that it was feasible to cut staff levels by 10 per cent, without dramatically affecting the United Nations work, however, further reductions would affect its ability to implement programmes. Most of the Organization's activities were mandated by legislative bodies and it was not for the Secretariat to cut programmes without approval by the General Assembly.

Mr. Paschke said enhanced oversight had become a meaningful and important part of the United Nations management culture, although internal controls were not as strong as they should be and some managers did not yet fully understand that internal oversight was a managerial duty. His office also had a proactive and advisory role and in coming months would teach and assist managers by giving them the tools to enhance self-evaluation and monitoring as a basic duty. For example, the Office had helped the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO) to improve its ability to apply past experience to the next operational phase and a lessons-learned unit had been set up. A new computer system allowed more effective follow-up on his Office's recommendations.

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A Special Rapporteur on Human Rights has sent an urgent appeal to the Nigerian Government over the arrest of two lawyers. Dato'Param Cumaraswamy, who was appointed by the Commission on Human Rights to examine the independence of judges and lawyers, expressed deep concern over the alleged harassment and persecution of the Nigerian lawyers for carrying out their professional duties.

Gani Fawehimni, a lawyer who is challenging the constitutionality of a special tribunal which is to try 19 Ogoni leaders on charges of murder and the constitutionality of the trials and executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 other Ogoni activists, was arrested on 30 January. Olisa Agbakoba, a human rights lawyer who represented Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other activists, was reportedly detained and interrogated by police after his return from abroad.

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The United Nations and Iraq continued discussions today on implementation of Security Council Resolution 986 (1995), which permits the sale of up to $2 billion worth of Iraqi oil over six months in exchange for food and medicine. A percentage of the oil revenue will go the United Nations Compensation Committee Fund in Geneva to help workers who suffered as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

A United Nations spokesman said that the Iraqi representatives appraised the UN delegation of food rationing and the distribution of medical supplies in the country and also presented documents on their urgent requirements for food, medicine and electricity.

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